

The Flame (previously Take My Hand)

by shaineland

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Summary: Hermione's world was filled with pain and suffering. Certainly more than any child should have to go through. Everything changed the day two men came knocking at her parent's door. Will Hermione finally be able to have a life without horror, or will it only get worse? AU DM/HG, other couples.

1. Chapter 1

author's note: This fiction is AU. It is a bit Dark, but not always. When I say Dark, I simply mean that some bad things happen. But it will be sweet as well. This is a love story after all. My characters are probably OOC as well, and for that I apologize to those of you that detest that. Still, I hope whomever does read this, will enjoy it.

Disclaimer: I do not in any way own part of the Harry Potter franchise, nor did I create any of these fantastic characters; Ms. JK Rowling did. There might be a few OC's, but hopefully they will only add to my storyline.

Hermione Granger sat on the edge of her bed and stared out the window at the tree across the street. She thought it might be an elm, but tree species weren't exactly where her strengths lay. It had happened again. She and her parents had been sitting at the dining room table, silent as usual, when her father began speaking in that quiet tone that always inspired fear.

The school had called. They told her mother that all of the lights in the auditorium had blown out at the same time. All of the students from Year Five at her Primary School had been in the huge room watching Schindler's List. Hermione had never seen it before and it was heartbreaking. So when all of the lights burst, the educators just automatically thought of her. These days they blamed every little thing on her. William Granger was furious to get that call. He

was embarrassed that his child could do such destruction. He was embarrassed that once again her mother had been called, and Helen Granger's work day had been disrupted. William and Helen were dentists. Their clientele consisted of some of the elite of London. They didn't have TIME to constantly be interrupted for these things.

William Granger's voice never rose above that quiet rage. "We have tried everything Hermione; exorcism, rebirthing, seclusionâ€¦ the leather strap. Nothing seems to be able to heal youâ€¦ rid you of these demons that are causing so much misery to your mother and I."

Hermione felt that quiet fear inside her belly start to squirm. Normally he would be yelling by now. And her motherâ€¦ Helen just sat, staring past Hermione. Hermione gulped, a harsh bubble of air traveling down her throat, feeling sharp and painful. In front of her, the crystal dinner goblet cracked. All three pairs of eyes focused in on the once beautiful glass.

"You will leave this table now," William was almost trembling, he was that angry. "You will go to your bedroom and remain there until I come and get you."

Hermione moved quickly, not wanting her father to strike out at her physically. So now she sat, waiting for her punishment. She didn't know why these things kept happening. It wasn't logical. People couldn't make things happen with their minds. Ridiculous. But her parents believed that she was doing it. Deep insideâ€¦ she knew she was doing it. It was almost as if she could feel something fill her up and push outward; sometimes it leaked, sometimes it exploded.

They'd loved her once, she thought with a sigh, her thin shoulders folding with despair. Hermione could clearly remember how they would go to the park and play and laugh. She remembered them taking her to movies, and to the mall for new school clothing. When had it changed? She couldn't remember when. Was there a specific point in time that they had stopped loving her? It was obvious they had. The cold, empty eyes that stared at her constantly made it quite evident. Hermione wondered if she should pack some things and go stay at the shelter. She'd done that before, and normally everything calmed down after a couple of days. The night lady at the shelter liked her, and would let her in, even if it was after admissions hours. Suddenly, with some clarity, Hermione could pinpoint when her life had become this Hell.

It had been when they began going to The Harvest Church. Three years ago they'd begun attending the services that the 'non-denominational' Church that one of the Granger's friends had suggested going. They had let Reverend Anthony into their lives. Where at one time the little things that happened around her amused them, once the reverend found out he began twisting them. They began believing whatever the man told them about their daughter being infested with demons. Why was it so easy for William and Helen Granger to believe something so utterly foolish?

She heard the doorbell ring and thought that she might be spared, depending on who had arrived. They didn't hit her when people were around. Hermione felt the tension flooding back into her body as her

father's voice began getting louder, and louder. He was furious. Then he called for her to come downstairs.

Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape apparated behind a small copse of trees and began walking to the home of one Miss Hermione Granger.

"Why are you so excited about this student, Albus?" the dour man asked. "Normally you would have Minerva doing this. I don't know why you expect me to do this task."

"Miss Granger is a very special student, Severus," Albus's tone was giddy. "I sense she will become very important to you; to all of us."

"And what makes this Muggleborn so special?" Severus rolled his eyes behind Albus's back. He was growing quite tired of being dragged along on any whim the Headmaster had. And if the man thought this child would become 'special' to Severus, then he was fooling himself.

"Prophecy, dear boy, prophecy."

Snape felt his stomach clinch. Damn Dumbledore for his secrets and machinations. He acted as though these children were pawns on a chessboard which he could move as desired. "You haven't shared this prophecy—| certainly it's separate from the Potter boy's?" Severus couldn't help the disdain that colored his words when speaking of James Potters' child.

"The two prophecies are different." Dumbledore admitted. Then his eyes flashed. "However, they could interlock if we play this game correctly. They are tied together in a way; or should be. I feel that it would be best to put Miss Granger into Mr. Potters' path. Perhaps the Weasley boy as well. I do believe that their youngest son will be attending. I might try to have a word with the hat."

"Perhaps you should let the children determine with whom they will build friendships? We do not even know what House any of them will be sorted into. Are you so sure the hat will listen?" After a moment of silence Snape spoke again, "So," Severus snapped. "are you going to share this hereto unmentioned prophecy?"

"Of course, I trust you completely Severus!"

Severus was getting a headache. He so wanted to tell the man what a fool he was.

Albus chuckled. "Strong, her heart and soul, as pure as any Pureblood born. Her blood will bring her pain.

To our own society, a shining beacon of hope and brilliance. Though, for now she is still a fragile flame.

The girl will grow strong, in mind, body and magic abilities. All whether she stands with the fiery, reborn bird, or he who shall not be named."

Severus kept his face blank, and his mind closed. "You realize that this is ridiculous. You couldn't possibly be sure that she is girl

mentioned. It could be any girl, Half-Blood OR Muggle-Born."

"I am simply telling you that this girl will have a large part in determining the ending of this war." Again the old man chuckled upon seeing his Potion Master's face. "Whichever side she chooses to supportâ€¦ which is why we must do all we can to lead her to The Order. We must make sure all goes according to plan."

"I thought it was to be determined between He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named, or the Potter boy? I thought one would have to destroy the other?" Severus frowned.

Dumbledore shrugged. "Partly. This prophecy was foretold the same evening as the Potter prophecy, but I didn't share it for many reasons. The most important is that it is much easier for Voldemort to only believe ONE prophecy exists. We hide this oneâ€¦ groom Miss Granger into our Orderâ€¦ and Harry will defeat Voldemort, paving the way of the Light."

William and Helen Granger sat in their family room and contemplated their options. Really, they had already decided. To be honest, the only reason they hadn't done anything before was pride. It would be humiliating to admit that they couldn't even help their own daughter. William grimaced, he thought they were just going to have to admit defeat.

There had always been odd little occurrences around Hermione. When she was barely walking, if she wanted a toy or stuffed animal that was too high for her to reach, somehow she got it. When she got upset things would break. Once she got so upset that it began to storm; a perfectly sunny day gone with the first sob. That was probably when they realized there was something wrong with their child; something they didn't know how to correct, or even control.

"Will," Helen's voice was soft. When he met her eyes she continued, "Reverend Anthony told us if the rebirthing didn't work he didn't know what else for us to do. I was so certainâ€¦ when she stopped breathing, and we had to give her CPR, I was sure that small death would destroy the evil inside of her; I was so sure she'd be well. Perhapsâ€¦ perhaps we should consider admitting her to a ward for the mentally ill?"

"That won't cure her, Helen," William sighed. "I just can't keep doing this."

Helen moved closer. "I know," she whispered. "It's exhausting. I never know if it will be a good day, or a bad day. I just wishâ€¦. I wish she was gone, Will, does that make me horrible?" Helen sighed heavily.

"If it does, then I am also horrible."

"So, we're really going to do it?" her voice was a whisper.

"I'll take her to children's services tomorrow," he confirmed. "Did you want to say goodbye first?"

"No." she shook her head. "No, I'm done."

"I will let her know to packâ€¦ Don't worry, Helen. I'll call

Reverend Anthony to come with me tomorrow."

Helen looked scared. "That takes a lot of worry away. I'm so scared you'll tell her, and she'll hurt you."

"Fortunately, she hasn't hurt anyone yetâ€¦ best we do this before she does."

They both jumped slightly as their doorbell chimed.

Helen stood and made her way to the door. "I wonder who it could be? It's so late." She looked through the peephole, and her head jerked back. "Will?" shock colored her voice.

"What's wrong, Love," he approached his wife.

"There are two men at the door wearing strange dresses," she hissed, the alarm evident.

"Wonder what they are selling?" William said scornfully. "Open the door, Helen. I'll speak with them."

She opened the door, and stood behind it, out of sight.

William sneered. Freaks. Two men stood on the porch. The elderly man had long gray hair, with an equally long, gray beard. This man stood slightly in front of the other, and looked at William with twinkling blue eyes, and a friendly smile on his wrinkled face. Small round spectacles perched on his nose. He wore a lime-greenâ€¦ bathrobe? Housecoat? Dress? William wasn't quite sure.

The other man was tall, pale and dark. He had a large, hooked nose, and beady black eyes. The man's hair hung black and limp to his shoulders. This man wore all black, and if he'd had the white collar, William would have thought him a priest.

"Good evening," the older of the two spoke in an especially friendly manner.

"What?" William snapped, causing the dark man to lift an eyebrow at him.

The old man spoke again. "Mr. and Mrs. Granger, isn't it?" his blue eyes sparkled as he spoke.

"Yes," William drew out the word, now suspicious. What did these two want?

"We've come to talk to you about your daughter, Hermioneâ€¦"

Before he'd even finished speaking, both Grangers were scowling. "What did she do now?" Helen asked waspishly.

William sighed, "What did she destroy, and how much is it going to cost to replace it?" The man turned to look at his wife. "Just something else to show us we've made the right decision."

"Oh, no, I apologize, she hasn't done anything wrong. Let me introduce myself. My name is Headmaster Albus Dumbledore. I am Headmaster of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and

Wizardryâ€|"

William's face started turning red. "Is this some type of sick joke?" he spoke through gritted teeth.

Finally, the dark man spoke. "No, no joke," he emphasized the 'k'. "I am Professor Severus Snape, Professor of Potions, and we've come to offer your daughter an opportunity to attend our school."

Just as the elderly man, Dumbledore, looked to begin speaking again William interrupted him. "Witchcraft and wizardry?"

Helen crossed herself, but William had already moved to the stairs, and shouted. "Get down here now!"

Albus and Severus frowned, and were surprised by the way the Muggles were reacting. Not that they weren't used to shock, or even fear, goodness sometimes parents even fainted, but these people were radiating rage. Albus took a moment to use Legilimens on the Muggle. What he found in the man's mind filled him with dread. "We'll be taking her tonight," he muttered so that only Severus could hear him.

A small girl, with large teeth and bushy, brown hair came down the stairs as quickly, and silently as possible. The very definition of petite, she was small boned, with delicate facial features; which was probably what made her teeth look too big. A lovely, if awkward, girl, Hermione Granger wore brown corduroy pants which hung loosely on her too thin waist, and a blue t-shirt. Her eyes were wide with fright; dark circles smudging underneath them.

Snape scowled. The girl was too pale, too thin, too bruised, and too bloody scared. She stood, trembling slightly, with her hands clasped in front of her. "Yes, Father?" she whispered.

William grabbed her arm, and jerked her forward none too gently. "These men are here for you, Daughter. They just told me the funniest thingâ€|" he let out a dark chuckle. "They say you're a witch."

Hermione's face went slack with shock. "What? N-n-no, Father! There's no such thing as a witch. I'm not a witch."

Helen stood and stared blankly at her only child. "It explains everything. All those things you make happen. All of the things you destroy. You're a child of the Devil. Reverend Anthony was right. You'll destroy this house."

"I've had enough of this," William's voice was hard. "You would know this tomorrow anyway, but you're no longer welcome in our home. I, along with Reverend Anthony, will drop you off at children's services tomorrow. I would suggest taking this time to pack the remainder of your belongings, and then stay in the bedroom until I come for you tomorrow morning."

Dumbledore and Snape looked at each other. "Am I correct in assuming you're giving up custody of Miss. Granger?"

Snape wanted to sigh. How perfectly it seemed things were working out for Dumbledore's plans.

"Not that it's any of your business, but yes. We will no longer have a child."

So many thoughts whirled through Hermione's mind. Fear of being on her own. Hurt that they didn't want her. Hope that her life would get better. "There's no need for you to take me tomorrow. I can go to the shelter tonightâ€¦ on my own."

William nodded once, "That does sound better. You have fifteen minutes to get your belongings and never come back. I can't take your last name away, your Grandmother Granger made that impossible. And she left you quite wealthy with your trust, so I know you'll survive." Then he looked at the two men who'd interrupted their evening. "Get out of our house."

It took Hermione less than the allotted fifteen minutes to get her meager belongings. She didn't understand what had happened. She was only eleven. How was she supposed to live? Certainly, she had the money from her Grandmother, her paternal grandmother, but she couldn't live on her own. Couldn't, well couldn't her parents get into trouble for this? She was certain this was some form of abuseâ€¦ neglectâ€¦ something. Not that she wasn't used to that. Hermione couldn't comprehend that her parents were giving her upâ€¦ she was not wanted any longer. That burned deep in her belly.

She stood on the porch, the front door swinging shut. Hermione felt lost. It felt like that door had just shut on her life. Well, she was intelligent, wasn't she? Sometimes too intelligent really. Hermione had no friends at school because of her intelligence. It made her angry. Hermione really wanted to get away from the house before her anger got the better of her. Sometimes when she was in a temperâ€¦ things happened. She would just have to figure this whole thing out. For this night though, she would have to go to the shelter which lay six blocks away.

With that destination in mind, Hermione barely noticed as she walked past the two flabbergasted men in bathrobes.

This had never happened to them before. Never had they approached a Muggle family and had this sort of reaction, and certainly, none had ever disowned their child in such a way; in front of strangers no less. Now they found themselves staring at her back as she moved away from them.

It was almost a flashback for Severus Snape. His parents had never thrown him onto the streets, but the abuseâ€¦ Merlin the abuse this child had suffered. Severus's eyes narrowed, he knew Albus would use this opportunity to mold the girl. The girl was young, probably impressionable. The old man would have her wrapped around his finger in no time. "I will take her on, Albus."

It was easy to see the girl was in shock. "Miss Granger," Albus called out as she walked. His mind was filled with the possibilities. As sad as it was, her parents tossing her away, this would put him in a good position to have total access to the girl.

She stopped and turned back to look at the strange man.

"Miss Granger, my name is Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, and we came

here to offer you a place with the other students matriculating in September at our school."

Hermione's head tilted to the side. "School?"

"It's a very special school," he told her, moving closer. "For people with your special abilities."

Hermione knew, she just knew he was talking about the things that happened around her. "We aren't supposed to talk about the incidents," she whispered.

"There, there child," Albus put his hand on the young girl's shoulder. "You are not evil, nor are you the spawn of some devil. You are a Witchâ€¦ a prestigious title, my dear. And at our school, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, we shall teach you everything you need to know."

"There are more people who can do thoseâ€¦ things?" she asked, a glimmer of excitement showing. Hermione wasn't sure she liked the man putting his hand on her, but she'd managed to create a mask so that none of her feelings would show. Well, unless she wanted them to.

"Oh yes," he told her with a pleased smile. "We teach children from first to seventh years."

Hermione's eyes flickered to the dark man, "What does this school teach?" He looked extremely grouchy; no twinkling eyes for him. However, Hermione thought that she liked him better for it. Honesty. He was honest with his unhappiness.

Snape quirked an eyebrow at the girl. Odd, he'd been sure she'd pay him no heed. Life was beginning to shine in the girl's amber eyes. "I am Professor Snape, I am a Potions Master," he told her. "I teach Potions. There are many other classes to take. Perhaps we should return to the school? You could become acquainted with it."

Her excited smile dropped. "Oh, I'm on my way to the shelterâ€¦"

"Shelter?" he inquired.

"Yes," she nodded. "I've stayed there a few times. Sometimes, when they're angry," her eyes flickered back to the home she'd lived in for eleven years. "Well, sometimes it's just best to find somewhere else to be." The small girl gave a huge sigh, her thin shoulders raising and dropping with it.

"Miss Granger," Albus spoke gently. "There is no need for you to go to a shelter. You can return to the Castle with us, and stay there until the new term starts. We'll make sure you are able to collect your supplies, and whatever else you might need."

Hermione knew she was taking a risk. She had grown up being told to never wander off with strangers, and she could go to the shelter. Butâ€¦ it sounded so much like an adventure, and she had always wanted an adventure. She was on her own now. "Will you tell me more about other Witches and Wizards?"

"Of course," Albus Dumbledore told her affably. "Severus, take care of the Muggles' memories, would you?"

Snape nodded sharply. It took him less than five minutes to modify the Grangers' memory with an Obliviate.

Hermione had to admit, the castle was beautiful. She had never seen anything like it. When leaving her neighborhood, Headmaster Dumbledore had told her they were going to travel by apparating. She wasn't sure she liked it. Landing had been difficult, she'd lost her balance, and she felt slightly nauseous. Currently, she stood against the bars of the wrought iron fence, her small hands wrapped around the bars, and stared in awe. "I want to know more," she whispered.

"We'll make sure to get you to the library. I would suggest starting out with *Hogwarts: A History*," Dumbledore twinkled at her. "Severus, would you show Miss Granger her chambers, and then perhaps after breakfast we can show her the library? Oh, and make sure to introduce her to Shinny."

Severus wanted to refuse, however, he knew he must not. Albus would be displeased, and he had told Dumbledore that he would be her magical Guardian. So he did as he was told, took the girl to a guest suite, and introduced her to Shinny, the house elf.

****1 Wk later****

Severus came through the floo at Malfoy Manor, and was immediately greeted by Narcissa Malfoy.

"Severus! I'm so glad you managed to come this evening. Draco was just talking about how excited he is to start attending Hogwarts, and your Potions class."

"Draco is already on his way to becoming a fine young potioneer," Severus smiled at the blonde woman slightly, but his eyes were tired and bleak.

Narcissa frowned, "Severus, what's wrong?" She placed her hand on his arm. He looked so tense, like a wire stretched until it finally snapped. And there was that something in his eyes. "Has something happened?"

"I have much to tell you all," he told her softly.

Just then Lucius Malfoy came into the room. "Severus, my dear friend, when did you get here?"

Snape looked at the man who had been his best friend from almost the beginning of his education at Hogwarts, and induction into Slytherin. "Only moments ago."

Narcissa moved over to her husband. "Darling, something has upset Severus."

Before his friend could question him, Snape lifted a hand, "I have already told your lovely wife that I will speak at supper."

Lucius looked worried. He just knew this had something to do with

that manipulative old fool. "Should I have Draco eat upstairs in his rooms this evening?"

Snape shook his head in the negative. "No, this will eventually affect him. And my Godson knows how to keep his own counsel."

It wasn't long before a house elf came to inform them that their meal was ready.

Draco, smiled and greeted his Uncle before taking a seat. His Godfather looked troubled. Draco figured that meant he should eat quietly, unless spoken to. They were obviously going to speak in his presence, otherwise he would have been relegated to his rooms. That he was being allowed to attend made him feel a sense of pride.

"I went with Albus to speak to a Muggle-born family about their daughter attending Hogwarts in the coming year."

"Doesn't Minerva normally handle those situations?" Narcissa asked.

"Yes, indeed she does," his voice was quiet. "We got to the girl's home andâ€¦ it was truly like nothing we'd ever seen before. We were there but moments, and the girl's parents disowned her. It seems that for a while now the parents have fallen to some outside influence; they've been abusing the child."

Draco's mouth dropped open. While he had no love for muggle-borns, he couldn't imagine how that would feel. He shuddered at the thought.

"Theyâ€¦ beat her? Disowned her?" Narcissa was aghast. There were many reasons for children to be disowned by their parents, but the child was eleven. What could she have done? And being beaten? The only time a child was struck in their society was when a serious misdeed had occurred. Even then it wasn't truly a physical beating, more like something to startle the child into realizing what they'd done wrong.

Severus rubbed his forehead. "The home was filled with abuse. It was like attending a reenactment of the Witch Trials. They've been made to believe she is possessed by evil, and that her accidental magic is caused by this evil. They have tried many methods to exorcise these demons. The girl is so thin, her bones press against her flesh, and that flesh looks paper thin. Looking into their thoughts... they've whipped her with a strap until she passed out, tried an exorcism," at his words Narcissa gasped. "Once she stopped breathing during some 'treatment' of making her try to crawl through blankets held tightly closed. The girl had to fight her way through it. They were vile acts. Worse than anything I ever saw the Dark Lord perform."

Lucius looked at his knew that Severus's childhood had been wretched, and he supposed that was what was upsetting Severus. He knew he had to let his friend finish speaking. But he did have to wonder why Albus would personally go and retrieve this girl. Albus Dumbledore rarely did anything without having a plan of action.

"She is a highly intelligent child. She's been at the castle for a week, and spends most of her free time in the library." Snape grimaced. "When we first arrived at the child's home, I asked Albus

why we were doing the job that Minerva normally carries out. There is a prophecy."

All three Malfoy's leaned back with a gasp. It would have been amusing, if not for the reason.

"I thought the only prophecy was dealing with the Potter boy," Lucius hissed.

"As did I my friend, as did I," Severus sneered. "He informed me ten feet from the girl's door. He stated that it was better for the Dark Lord to only know of one prophecy. It's taken me the better part of this week, but I have located the prophecyâ€ without having to go to the bloody Ministry." He rubbed his face with both hands. "He said that she would help determine the way in which the war ends. Who will rule." He held out a small sheet of parchment to Lucius.

Lucius opened the folded paper, and read out loud.

"Strong; her heart and soul, as pure as any Pureblood born. Her blood will bring her pain.

To our own society, a shining beacon of hope and brilliance. Though, for now she is still a fragile flame.

The girl, powerful, in mind, body and abilities. All whether she stands with the bird born of fire, or he who shall not be named."

"He's planning on using her as a chess piece in his little games then?" Lucius muttered.

"Yes. He has already begun the whispers of blood purity, the hatred between the different houses. He's filling her with fear of Purebloods and Slytherins. He talks of the Dark Lord, and how the Dark Lord wishes all Muggle-Born dead. And he wishes to put her in the path of Potter, and the youngest Weasley boy. He wants to mold her into the perfect little Order member. I wouldn't be surprised if he's already planning a betrothal for her."

"How is the girl taking to these machinations?" Narcissa asked softly.

"I do not know. I have only seen her at meals," he sighed. "He is going to try to cajole the hat into putting her into Gryffindor."

Draco wanted to gag. Gryffindorsâ€ stupid sods. He thought the Headmaster was supposed to be all honest; the supposed leader of the light. Besides, why did the old man think he needed to talk the hat into anything? She was a muggle-born, it's not like it would put her in Slytherin.

"Will someone be named her Guardian?" Narcissa questioned. Her mind was already spinning and planning with all of the possibilities. She met her husband's eyes for but a moment, but had a feeling he too was considering all.

"Dumbledore wishes for me to be the girl's Guardian. I expect he thinks that will pull me more into the Order, perhaps he thinks he

can use her as a spy for him to make sure I follow his rules."

Now Lucius looked concerned. "Do you think he suspects that you are not truly loyal to his cause?"

Snape waved this away. "No. I am protected from him. I simply believe that anything he has that can draw the Order of the Phoenix closer, anything that will give him the upper-hand, that is what he looks for. He probably believes that the Dark Lord will banish me if I am raising the child, instead of killing her."

"That's ridiculous. He really does not know our Lord at all, does he? You are far too valued by our Lord for him to care whether or not you are guiding a child of any birth. The Dark Lord himself initiated three Muggle-borns before he passed. The man simply had high standards." Narcissa said, and then motioned the elves to deliver dessert. "So, he wishes for you to watch over the little Muggle-born!" Suddenly Narcissa gave a bright smile, she knew he would do so. As soon as he'd described the girl's suffering she'd known. "Well, I think that as your closest, and dearest friends, you should introduce us to the little love."

Snape raised one eyebrow.

"Oh, come now, Severus, if that man has been filling the girl's head with horror stories of Purebloods hating Muggle-borns, don't you think it would be wise to let her meet some of these 'monsters'?" the elegant blonde woman smiled smugly.

Albus had informed Severus that the Potions Master would be taking the little chit to get her school supplies. The Headmaster had not looked happy at the time, and had not even given the Potions Professor time to decline before moving away at an agitated pace. Now, Severus had to locate the girl. He had a feeling she was in the Library.

2. Chapter 2

****Author's note:** Reminder this is seriously AU. There will be Dumbledore bashing and I'm thinking quite a bit of OOC. sorry if that offends. Maybe some Weasley bashing... probably not all of them though. Not sure where I'm going to take Harry yet. ******

****Same Disclaimer:** I own nothing, and get no money for it. Just the happiness of someone reading my fiction of fiction. thank you. ******

****77****

Hermione Granger sat at a table in the back of the Library reading Hogwarts: A History for the fourth time. She'd now been at the castle for two months, and already she loved it. She did however wonder if she would still be as fond once the other students were there. Hermione had never made friends easily, and the friends she did make didn't stick with her when the 'incidents' started. Would she be able to make friends now?

Headmaster Dumbledore had pulled her aside and told her that on the day when students were to begin arriving, they would take her and put

her on the train with everyone else. That way she would have the 'full student experience'. Jolly voice, and twinkling eyes, he had been the epitome of what all the children at her previous school would have called Santa Claus. But Hermione Granger was not one of those children. She had known that Old Saint Nick was a myth for a long time; a story told to children to make them behave so they would receive presents. She didn't believe in some benevolent old man in a red suit, and she didn't believe in Albus Dumbledore.

He was too calculating. Certainly he was kind, but there was an air of manipulation around the man. Every time he looked at her there was something in his eyes that told her he wasn't really seeing her at all, at least not as herself. He was scheming. She almost felt bad for not liking him. After all, he had brought her to this school, and opened her world to new, exciting things. He had given her a home when she had lost the only one she had ever known even if it had been a cold, horror-filled place. Then she would see him watching her, and it reminded her of Reverend Anthony. That gave her the chills as fear slid down her spine.

Reading Hogwarts: A History had introduced her to the idea of the four houses of Hogwarts; Gryffindor for the brave, Ravenclaw for the intelligent, Hufflepuff for the loyal, and Slytherin for the cunning. Hermione wondered what would happen when she was sorted. Headmaster had told her about Purebloods, Half-Bloods and Muggle-Borns. He'd told her of the hate between Gryffindor and Slytherin, and how all of the dark wizards came from Slytherin. Yesterday she'd found a thin leather-bound book on the table she sat at in the library. The book spoke of a Lord Voldemort, and how he wanted to kill all Muggle-Borns; most of his followers were Slytherin. She knew the Headmaster had been the one to leave that little book on her table.

Dumbledore had told her about Harry Potter, and how he defeated Voldemort as a baby, but that confused her. Really, wasn't it his mother who defeated Voldemort? Lily Potter was the one who stepped in front of Voldemort, and her actions are what saved the boy. He just got lucky enough that it worked. She didn't see what was so special about that.

She did like most of the other professors. Professor McGonagall had been rather nice, and Professor Flitwick had let her borrow a book on charms, and the Librarian, Madame Pince, was very kind. So far, she'd met all of the year round inhabitants of the castle, including the ghosts- boy had that taken a little bit to get used to. But by far, her favorite teacher was Professor Snape. He was gruff and standoffish, and he sneered quite a bit, but he was highly intelligent. He didn't treat her like a child, or, well, a small child. He had even offered to let her borrow one of his books; the only stipulation being she must sit in his laboratory to read it. She understood. If it was her book she'd want to make sure it stayed safe too. Hermione had also heard the Headmaster talking to someone saying that the Potions Professor was to be her guardian. Hermione knew that Professor Snape had been a Slytherin. Why then would he want to look after her? Still, she trusted him more than the Headmaster, but she refused to let herself feel hope.

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"Miss Granger," Snape broke the girl out of her thoughts. "It appears

that I will be escorting you to Diagon Alley to get you the supplies necessary for the school year. We've notified Gringotts' that you will be in to open an account and do a currency exchange."

Hermione stood and approached the man. "Thank you, Professor."

He turned, his robes swinging outward dramatically, and she followed him silently. They'd almost made it to the gates of the school when the large man, Hagrid came running towards them. Hermione tried to control her voice, but couldn't help the small whimper she gave as she stepped slightly behind Professor Snape.

Severus looked at the girl for a moment before realizing she was frightened of the half-giant. "What is it you need?" he didn't even bother addressing the other man with title.

"I'm on my way out, I am," the groundskeeper said, paying no attention to the little girl at Snape's side. "I've been trusted to go get Harry Potter."

"How fortunate you are," Snape said dryly. "We must be off. We have many things to accomplish before returning." With that said, Severus took the little girl's hand and apparated to The Leaky Cauldron

As soon as they landed Hermione almost breathed a sigh of relief. True she still felt somewhat shaky from the method of travel, but the large man terrified her. Oh, she knew that he seemed perfectly nice, but he was reckless. He was constantly in the infirmary for something. For instance, the man had decided to raise scorpions. Giant scorpions. A normal person would not be doing this! What if one got loose? Also, he seemed to constantly be talking about this Harry Potter. Hermione had already decided she didn't want to be in the same house as the boy. Everybody would constantly be stroking the boy's ego, telling him how wonderful he was. She knew that she would be overshadowed by this Potter boy, the hero who lived through a killing curse, everybody would, but if they were in the same house she'd never be seen. It wasn't as if she wanted to be a shining star, but she certainly didn't want to be one to fade to nothing.

Snape watched the girl's eyes light up in awe as soon as the bricks opened and she got her first look at Diagon Alley.

"It's like a dream," she whispered.

"Come, let's head to the bank." Severus put his hand on Hermione's shoulder and led her forward. Once they were at the bank, for a moment he feared she would be frightened of the goblins. Instead, she was extremely polite. Before they left the bank, she'd turned around and spoken softly to the account manager.

"Sir, I just wanted to say how wonderful I think you all are," she told him shyly.

For a moment the goblin looked as if he didn't trust her. Then he looked into her eyes; those large, liquid amber eyes. He bowed slightly, "Thank you, Miss."

Severus took her to Madame Malkins so she could get fitted for her robes. "I am going to the alchemist shop while you're in here," he told her, and noticed how she straightened her back. "Nothing will

happen to you, so just stay calm. I won't be long."

Hermione nodded, and watched as he walked away. Then, bracing herself, she entered the robes shop.

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Upon entering she found the shop wasn't extremely busy. She was glad for that. There was one boy on a dais being measured. The tape measure and pins were swirling around him in the air, taking direction from an older woman bent on her knees. The woman looked up when she heard the bell over the front door jingle.

"Come in, come in child. New robes? Why don't you stand on this platform, and I'll get you in a moment?" the woman motioned to the dais next to the boy.

The boy was either her age, or older. Obviously he would be attending school in the next term. He was looking towards her and had the greyest eyes she'd ever seen; so grey as to look almost blue. And his hair! His hair was the whitest of blondes; just shades lighter than the first, and only, Barbie doll she'd had. She'd never seen hair that light on a person before. Hermione had a feeling that he would be very handsome when he grew up. She thought he was handsome now. She looked down at her feet, knowing she was blushing slightly, and suddenly too shy.

"Hello," he said with a grin. "I'm Draco."

"Hello," she responded softly.

"New robes for school? I was supposed to come in tomorrow, but my parents brought me in today because they have to meet a family friend." He shared. "Luckily, Madame Malkin was able to get me in."

The woman mumbled something under her breath which sounded like, 'as if I had a choice', but Hermione couldn't be sure.

"What year are you? What school will you be attending?"

"I'll be a First Year at Hogwarts," she told him.

"Me too!" Draco couldn't seem to take his eyes off of the girl standing next to him. She wore a pretty yellow sundress, and even though she was a little pale, and thin, she was still beautiful. He could look in her eyes forever; they were a mix between gold and brown and were so warm. He wondered what her name was. Perhaps she'd get sorted into Slytherin and they'd be able to spend time together. If she was in Slytherin they'd have most of their classes together as well. "I can't hardly wait. I feel like it's taken forever to be able to go."

"I'm excited as well," she smiled at him, and he had to swallow hard.

"Alright, Mr. Malfoy. All done." Madame Malkin stood and removed the pinned robes from the boy.

Hermione noticed that for an eleven-year-old he certainly dressed

sharp. This boy came from money. "I guess I'll see you at school then."

"Yeah," Draco wanted to stay but really couldn't find a reason to, so he left the shop hoping he'd see her again as soon as they got to the train. "I'll look for you then!"

All she could do was nod, then he was out the door, and the shopkeeper began measuring her.

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As soon as Draco made it out of the shop he began running to find his parents. Now he was glad they'd come to Diagon Alley a day before they were supposed to.

"Mum," he nearly shouted, drawing the attention of the pale-haired, elegant woman seated at an outdoor café.

All she had to do was raise one eyebrow, and he slowed to a walk as he approached. Narcissa looked at her son closely. He'd grown up so fast. Currently his hair was slightly disheveled, and his face was bright, and excited. "Did something happen, Draco?"

Draco reached his mother and began blushing. Maybe he should be talking to his father about this—no, his mum was always good to talk to. "There was a girl, Mum, she came in to get her robes while I was there."

Narcissa listened carefully, for the first time her son's words almost jumbled as he spoke. He'd met a girl. She felt a small pang in her heart. Already? Was he that old already?

"Mum, she was beautiful," he sighed.

"And what was this beauty's name, love?"

Draco's mouth popped open in a gasp, "I never got it! Merlin, Mum! I never got her name, just that she would be a First Year like me."

Narcissa stifled the chuckle that wanted to come out. Too besotted to get a name, wasn't that just like his father? "Well, perhaps we'll see her around the Alley, shopping today—or certainly on the train to school," she told, calming him slightly.

"I can't wait for you to see her, Mum," Draco's voice was filled with wonder. "Her hair was so long, and so curly—sort of like Auntie Bella, but hers was a chocolate brown, with caramel highlights. She wasn't very big, two inches shorter than me probably, but really it was her eyes—they were amazing."

Narcissa couldn't help the widening of her eyes. Her son was completely besotted by a girl he'd seen for less than ten minutes, but really, she thought wryly, that did seem to be the Malfoy way. "Come now, we're meeting your Godfather and his ward for lunch." Narcissa began steering Draco to the restaurant where they were meeting his father. Severus and his ward should be showing up shortly after. After lunch, if everything went well, they would all make the trip to Ollivander's Wand Shop together.

All three Malfoy's were little apprehensive about meeting the Muggle-Born. No matter their prejudices, this girl had a prophecy dealing with their Dark Lord. Dumbledore was already poisoning the girl's mind to them, and it was up to the Malfoys, at least to begin with, to prove him wrong. It would be difficult, but they would do whatever was required of them. For their Lord to win, the girl had to choose their side.

"Draco," Narcissa began thoughtfully, "I want you to make sure and be as polite and friendly as possible with this girl your Godfather is introducing to us today."

"Why do we consider her special if she comes from Muggles, and is beneath us?" he asked inquisitively.

"Whenever your life is entwined with prophecy it makes one special, whether it be for good or bad."

Draco looked slightly confused. "But I've heard some of the others say that Mudbl-" he started to say the word he'd heard from a lot of older Pureblood kids, and at the look on his mother's face, changed it quickly, "Muggle-Borns are filthy, disgusting, stupid creatures that shouldn't be allowed in our World."

"They're not necessarily any of those things darling," she told him diplomatically. Narcissa knew this to be true. She'd seen Muggle-Borns achieve great successes. However, being raised as a Black, and then having Malfoy in-laws, didn't allow that belief to be shown publicly. No matter what they all thought though, she and Lucius had their own reasons for believing Muggle-Borns to be inferior. "The problem with Muggle-Borns," she began, picking her words carefully, "is that they enter Wizarding society and know nothing of our beliefs, laws, or traditions. And the majority of them do not want to take the time to learn. We are proud of our heritage, and when they come into our world, acting self-entitled, it causes tension. THEY are entering our world, therefore, if they want to be acknowledged, they should take the time to learn what's important to us; our ways and practices. But they don't and it means our traditions will die out if not looked after. That's not how all Purebloods feel of course, but it is how the Malfoys feel. Plus, it doesn't help that there was that period of time when they decided to burn, drown, or hang witchesâ€| and that was real witches, and regular Muggles they thought were witches."

"Ohâ€|" Draco seemed to think on that for a moment, and then gave a short nod of his head. "Well then, what about Blood Traitors?"

She grimaced, "They are an entirely different story."

"There's Father!"

Narcissa watched the boy race ahead to Lucius and smiled slightly. She was sure he wanted to tell his father about the girl from the robes shop. She decided to let him be a boy, and didn't scold him for running. It wouldn't hurt to let the normal people see the Malfoys having innocent fun. When Lucius saw the boy, he looked surprised, and looked at her quickly. She just shook her head at him, her eyes sparkling brightly.

"Father!" Draco reached his father and stopped, then he winced thinking he might get into trouble for running again. However, his father didn't say anything. Now that he'd reached the older man he felt a bit tongue-tied. "Father, I met a girl," He said in nearly a whisper.

This caused Lucius to smile. "Oh, really?"

"Yes, and Father, she's beautiful," Draco sighed thinking back to the girl again.

Narcissa had reached them, and Lucius raised her hand to kiss her fingers lightly, before meeting her eyes. "My Love," he murmured, before listening to his son moon over a girl whose name he did not know.

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Severus and Hermione exited the Madame Malkins, and began walking. "Miss Granger," he began, and saw that she immediately paid the utmost attention. "We have been invited to lunch with some very old friends of mine; I would consider them family actually. Would this be a problem for you?"

Hermione blinked. He wanted to be seen with her, and introduce her to his friends. Then she remembered Dumbledore's words. "Are they Purebloods, Sir?" she asked quietly.

Severus made sure his face did not betray him. "Yes, is that an issue?"

"No, Sir," she reassured him. "I only ask because, well, the Headmaster told me that most of your acquaintances are Purebloods, and that they do not look upon Muggle-Borns fondly. He said I always had to be on my guard around them, and to expect them to be hostile, and call me names." Hermione saw his scowl, and worried she'd offended him. "I don't mind meeting your friends, Sir." Hermione wished she could tell him what she thought of the Headmaster, but what if that angered him? What if he went back to Dumbledore and told the man whatever she told him? The two walked quietly for another moment before she made a decision and spoke again. "Sir, may I speak freely with you?"

Snape raised an eyebrow. This could be interesting, he thought, so he motioned for her to do so.

"Sir, I don't trust Headmaster Dumbledore," she said plainly, her Guardian's expression did not change. "I apologize, Sir. I know I should, but"

"But what child?" now Snape's voice was soft.

"He scares me. He reminds me of Reverend Anthony," Hermione's voice wobbled a bit, and her eyes went a little unfocused. She hadn't spoken of her family, or her life before since the very first night. "Whenever he looks at me it feels like he's calculating, and scheming, figuring out a way to get something from me. He's left books for me, talking about your war and the different factions, the Death Eaters, Lord Voldemort, and the boy the Potter boy. I'm sorry if I've offended you, Sir." Hermione found herself bracing to

be hit.

Severus stopped for a moment, and put his hand on her shoulder very gently. "You have not offended me, Miss Granger. If anything you have shown yourself to be quite savvy."

"He IS trying to get something from me, or make me do something, isn't he, Professor?"

Snape considered lying for a tenth of a second, but looking into her wide eyes, he went with the truth, "Yes. Perhaps we will discuss this at lunch with my friends? I think they would find your observations very interesting."

She looked worried. "If you think that is for the best, Sir. However, I don't feel safe—I don't believe we should speak of this out in public, Sir." Hermione finally managed to get her thoughts out.

Once again Snape was impressed. Her mind moved quickly, focusing, analyzing, reaching a conclusion, and moving on to the next step. He had to admit, he had not had a student like her in the past ten years. "We will speak with Lucius and Narcissa, and see if they would like to go somewhere more private after we go to get your wands."

"Thank you," Hermione swallowed through a thickness in her throat. Yes, he seemed unfriendly, and would probably be wretched and scary as a teacher, but she could trust him. Now she could only hope his faith in his friends wasn't misplaced.

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The first thing Hermione noticed when Professor Snape pointed out his friends, was all the pale hair; three people with hair so pale it almost looked like moonlight and silky straight. So much prettier than her own. Then she saw Draco. He was speaking to the older man, who must be his father. Her heart dropped. He was a Pureblood. He would never want to speak to her, or be her friend now. She wouldn't be in the same house as he was. Muggle-Borns don't go to Slytherin. She saw the new, and fragile friendship slipping away before it even really began.

Snape had noticed Hermione give a little jerk when she first saw the Malfoys, but he expected she was still cautious about the blood status issue. "Lucius, Narcissa, Draco, this is my ward, Hermione Granger. Miss Granger, my oldest and dearest friends, the Malfoys. Draco is my Godson, and will be attending Hogwarts with you in the fall."

Hermione, wanting to make as good of an impression as she could, gave a small curtsy, "It's a pleasure to meet you."

Narcissa looked at the little Muggle-Born closely. She was a petite girl, and Narcissa thought that Hermione would always be on the smaller side. Narcissa could see the purple shadows under the girl's eyes that spoke of the nightmares she'd seen. Even though her clothing was clean, and well maintained, it was ill fitting as she was practically skin and bones. However, the girl was lovely; stunning bone structure, long thick eyelashes, and a headful of riotous curls, which seemed to almost have a mind of their own. Then

the girl happened to glance up, and Narcissa found herself looking into wide, amber eyes. This was the girl Draco had met at Madame Malkins. For a moment she thought that he was so far taken with the girl worried her. She wondered now what Lucius would do when he found out his son cared for a Muggle-Born. Narcissa almost frowned. What did she feel about it?

When the girl curtsied and was polite and well mannered, Narcissa smiled in approval. Perhaps she'd would entice Lucius into agreeing, as long as the girl was smart, and her boy cared for the little one.

"Would you both care to have a seat?" Lucius offered. He had to admit, he was intrigued. He'd looked at his son when the two had approached, and the surprise in his son's face told him quite a bit. Let's see what this girl is made of, he thought.

Draco couldn't help staring. It was her; the girl! THE girl. Her name was Hermione, and she was a Muggle-Born. His stomach clutched. His father wouldn't let him court a Muggle-Born. Did he WANT to court a Muggle-Born? He wasn't supposed to, right? Remembering his mother's words to him earlier, he cleared his throat. "Hello again."

She looked up at him shyly, startled that he was speaking to her. "Hello, Draco."

He smiled when she said his name, "So your name's Hermione, I forgot to get it at the shop." He laughed a little bit.

Her eyes sparkled a bit, as some of her fear left her. "Yes, I'm sorry I didn't give it to you when you gave me yours."

Both children got a bit bashful, and so Lucius broke the silence. "So, Miss Granger, I understand that you're living at the school. How do you like it?"

Hermione's eyes widened slightly. She found that she was scared of grown men—really just any male period, but she tried to control that. "I love it, Sir. I have my own room to myself, and it's so big!" they all watched as her eyes widened and shone with happiness. "And Shinny, she's a house elf, she comes and keeps me company when I am lonely, that's very nice," she sighed. "And the library! The library is brilliant. Madame Pince says I can come in at any time because I care for the books. They're beautiful." Hermione didn't realize her voice was trembling. "And the professors all let me read their special books, even Professor Snape!"

Lucius and Severus chuckled. Narcissa addressed the girl, "Don't you ever get lonely for the company of other children?"

Hermione found herself embarrassed. She would have to tell these people, who were turning out to be very nice, that most people didn't like her. "Well, not really," she said quietly. "I really never had friends at my other school. Most people don't like me much." She shrugged. "I just don't have a good personality. And I've been told—" she broke off with a flush, realizing she was about to tell these people that she knew they thought her beneath them.

Narcissa's heart began to ache for this child. "What were you told, Miss Granger?"

"Well, I'm a Muggle-Born Ma'am, and I have learned through reading, and other things the Headmaster and professors have told me, that being Muggle-Born means I will be thought of as less. That being the case, I would assume most of the other students will steer clear of me."

Severus frowned, not realizing the others were frowning as well, but Hermione saw none of this as her head was facing down. "Hermione," Snape said, using her first name for the first time. "You will make many friends at Hogwarts. You're incredibly bright, and I can guess where you were told you didn't have a good personality, but that's wrong."

"Thank you," she whispered. Their food came and they all began to eat.

"Hermione, are you excited to go get your wand?" Draco asked. The adults were speaking quietly amongst themselves. He felt bad. Hadn't he just been thinking that he wouldn't be able to be her friend because of her blood status? The whole thing was still confusing to him, but he was going to push that aside for now. His mother had told him to be friendly and polite, and he was going to. But not because she told him to. He was going to do it because he wanted to. Something about her made him want to curl around her and protect her. Which was weird. He knew Malfoys found their true love early in life, but he was only eleven. Perhaps it wasn't what he thought it was.

"I am. But a little nervous too."

"Why nervous?" he asked scooting closer to her.

She shrugged. "Draco, I grew up being told that the 'incidents' were evil, and I was punished for them."

Draco frowned. "Your bouts of accidental magic? We all have them!"

"They really aren't natural in the M-muggle world." She stumbled a bit over the new term for normal people.

"I'm sorry. I never really thought about how different it must to come from somewhere with no magic, into a world that's almost fully run on magic."

"I love it," she confessed. "I'm not a freak here. Just a Muggle-Born."

"I don't care that you're a Muggle-Born," he told her, taking a stand. "I mean, you've got magic, just like me."

She smiled sweetly at him. "Thank you, Draco. It's nice to think I have a friend, and school hasn't even started."

Draco blushed, and it was his turn to shrug a little.

****Author's note: Reminder this is seriously AU. There will be Dumbledore bashing and I'm thinking quite a bit of OOC. sorry if that offends. Bashing some of the Weasleys. Not sure where I'm going to take Harry yet.****

****There is a poll on my profile for this story. Thank you.****

****Same Disclaimer: I own nothing, and get no money for it. Just the happiness of someone reading my fiction of fiction. thank you.6****

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Seeing that Hermione was caught up in speaking with Draco, Severus made sure to speak quietly so that only Narcissa and Lucius could hear him. "He has indeed been trying to poison her mind." His friends didn't need to ask who.

Narcissa looked at the girl again. Her little yellow sundress was pretty, but too baggy on her. Besides that, though, her hair was clean and shiny, there was no dirt or smudges on her face or arms, which most children do have, even Purebloods. And her nails were clean and short. Narcissa thought that Hermione had shown impeccable manners so far. When the girl grew up, she would be stunning.

Narcissa watched as Hermione bent slightly towards Draco as he spoke quietly to her, both children blushing. Then she frowned. What was that mark on her neck?

"Did she happen to mention anything he's been saying?" Lucius asked.

"At first I think she was hesitant. I think she believed I would go back to Dumbledore and repeat anything she told me. I tried to assure her that would not happen. I told her perhaps we should talk about it with you and Narcissa during lunch." Severus smirked slightly, pride in his eyes. "She doesn't know about privacy bubbles, but she said that she didn't believe what she had to say should be repeated in public."

Lucius nodded in approval. "So not only is she book smart, but she shows common sense."

"Severus, what is that reddish mark on the back of her neck?" Narcissa asked with a frown.

He frowned. "We haven't spoken of anything that happened before she came to Hogwarts. However, to me it looks as if someone branded her with a cross."

Narcissa looked horrified.

Lucius reached over and gently squeezed his wife's hand. "Is she still ill?"

Snape knew what his friend was talking about. Hermione still looked quite malnourished and bruised. "Believe it or not, she looks ten times better than she did when we got her."

"You're becoming attached, Dear Friend," Narcissa commented as she rejoined their conversation.

He nodded slowly, "I've barely spent any time with the child, but everything within me is saying protect the girl. And the questions she asked while I was brewingâ€¦ I don't even have six years that ask me some of those."

"I quite like her," Narcissa told the men. "She is quite a darling, Severus. I think you should bring her to the Manor so she has children to play with. She shouldn't have to have a house elf as her only friend." Narcissa smiled as she thought it through. "We can invite all of the children over for the last of the summer."

"That's a marvelous idea, Darling," Lucius smiled. He'd thought perhaps that getting to know the little Muggle-Born would be hard. He thought he'd have to act kind, and pleasant, but Severus was right. There was something about the girl that just drew a person in. And looking at her, the way she carried herself, whatever evils the Muggles had done to her had not broken her. And if she was the one spoken of in the prophecy, well, so far it was describing her accurately. "Seeing how she wishes to speak with us in private, after the wand shop we could go to the Manor if you'd like."

"I think that would be for the best." Severus agreed. Then he looked to Narcissa, "We can certainly ask her if she would be interested in going to the Manor for a few days to spend time with other children."

All three adults looked over as they heard a giggle. Draco was grinning broadly, a faint flush to his cheeks, and Hermione was blushing a deep pink and looking up at him shyly. This made all three smile.

"I never thought that I'd be happy seeing something like this," Lucius murmured.

"I told him to be polite and kind, but I don't think he's following my instructions at all. He's smitten," Narcissa thought she might cry. "They're only eleven and already smitten."

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"You'll like Theo and Blaise, they're my best mates." Draco told her when they'd stopped laughing at the strange hat a lady in the restaurant was wearing. It had a vulture on it! He'd made her laugh when he asked her if she thought the lady had caught it herself.

Hermione sobered quickly, "Draco, what if they don't like me? Aren't they Purebloods too?"

Draco frowned. "They'll like you. You're too brilliant for them not to."

Again she smiled shyly. "You're very kind."

Draco snorted. "Not really. I'm pretty spoiled, and I like getting my way. If I want something I am determined I will get it, and to tell the truth, if I don't like someone, I tend to make their lives hell."

He spoke in a matter of fact tone, then he cleared his throat. "You should come see Malfoy Manor soon."

"Oh! I'll have to ask Professor Snape."

Now the boy smiled widely, "He'll say yes. He comes over all the time. Now he can bring you along."

"Children, are you ready to go get your wands?" Narcissa asked seeing that everyone had finished their meals.

Both children turned their heads towards her quickly, almost crying out their approval.

As soon as they were out of the restaurant, Lucius offered his arm to Narcissa with a smile. Draco, seeing his father's actions, mimicked the man, and held out his arm. Hermione looked startled for a moment, but then tentatively accepted. "You don't have to do this you know?"

Draco snorted. "You are a lady, and I shall treat you as such."

"Draco, I'm eleven."

He shook his head, "Age does not matter in this instance, Hermione. These are things I need to learn. For when I'm older and courting my wife to be. Malfoys are betrothed young, so I will make sure to always treat my intended with respect and courtesy."

"Are they arranged marriages?" Hermione asked. It sounded positively archaic to her.

Draco shrugged, "In some instances, yes, but my family, on my father's side, we have always made a love match."

She smiled at him, "Yes, it is very easy to see how much your father loves your mother."

"Now that you're living in Wizarding Society you'll have to start learning our traditions," he said, thinking about the conversation he'd had earlier in the day with his mum.

Now she looked enthusiastic, "Oh! I have! There are two or three books in the library that I'm reading. I want to fit in. This is going to be my world now. I need to learn everything that's important to Wizards and Witches."

"You don't want to keep anything from the other world?" he asked curiously.

"Why?" she asked bewildered. "For me, at least, it was a horrible world. I might not be completely welcome in this one, but I'm going to try."

Draco frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Draco, I'm Muggle-Born. I know what that means for me. Most of it's been explained. There won't be any arranged marriages for me." She gave him a lopsided smile. "Those sorts of things are for the elite."

I've already been told it will be hard for me to make a match, unless he's a Muggle-Born, or Half-Blood."

He was about to say something, but his father announced their arrival to the shop.

Severus held the thick, wooden door open for everyone, and they entered Ollivander's. Hermione gave a small scream when an old man popped out of nowhere. She trembled as he stared at her closely, and took a step back towards Professor Snape even as her hand clenched on Draco's arm.

"Well, hello there. Mr. Malfoy, I thought I'd be seeing you soon. And Miss Granger," the man smiled. "You are still going by Granger, aren't you?"

"Her name is Hermione Granger, and she's here for her wand," Draco said with a scowl.

"I've been waiting for you for a long time" he murmured, but was still loud enough for them to hear him. "We all have. My name is Garrick Ollivander, and welcome to my store."

If Severus, Lucius, or Narcissa had any doubts that Hermione was the girl from the prophecy, they were put to rest by these words.

The old man began finding them both wands, helping Hermione first. She swallowed hard when her first swing of a wand one of Ollivander's bookshelves blew up. Her mouth gaped open as she watched the confetti, because that's all that was left, float down. Would they send her back now? Tell her that obviously she wasn't a real witch if she couldn't even use a wand? Tell her she was being sent away because real witches didn't destroy everything in their path.

After six wands, and Hermione being close to tears, the old man went underneath the counter and pulled out a slender silver container; it was plain silver, with no markings showing. He brought it over and opened it in front of her. "Here child, try this one."

Hermione reached in and zings traveled up her arm. It felt like air. The wand was some type of lighter colored wood, and was polished to almost a gloss. She let the wand move in an easy arc, and a bright glow encompassed the entire shop. When the glow faded, and everyone opened their eyes, the bookshelf, and books, she'd destroyed was back to perfect.

"Willow wood, from the Whomping Willow at Hogwarts," Garrick Ollivander shared. "Given by the tree freely, ten inches, with a dual core of a phoenix feather and unicorn horn shavings, both also given freely. Quite a wand" yes, quite a wand." He nodded slowly. "Now, for you Mr. Malfoy. I already know what should be yours." The man hurried back over to the counter where he'd gotten the silver wand case, and came back out with an onyx box similar to the silver. "Take it," he nodded towards Draco. "I honestly thought you would be carrying something like an Elm, or perhaps Hawthorn. But with Miss Granger claiming THAT wand, I think perhaps THIS one will do." Ollivander nodded knowingly.

Draco, after giving one quick look to his parents, who both nodded to him, reached in and picked up the wand. It felt like an extension of

his arm. His fingers literally tingled from holding it.

"Black Oak," Ollivander began. "Eleven inches, with the core of a unicorn hair and phoenix tears. The phoenix who donated both the tears, and the feather for these two wands, was actually the mother of Albus Dumbledore's phoenix, Fawkes."

Draco stared at the smooth, polished dark wood of the wand. He lifted it and swished slightly, and a beautiful chiming filled the shop.

Garrick Ollivander couldn't believe that the day had come. "Ah, the chimes. I have not heard those in a very long time."

"How much do we owe you, Mr. Ollivander?" Lucius asked. He made a mental note to look up anything he could on the two wands. The way the wand-maker was looking, the boxes they were held in, and the abnormal reactions of joining to their wand-holders, told him they would special. The man's next words though, almost made him choke.

"Nothing. It lightens my mind knowing they've been given and received. I only hope you remember me if there ever comes a time." He turned and walked to the back of his shop, and the five shoppers left.

"We're going to travel to the Malfoy's Manor for a bit," Severus spoke quietly to Hermione. "Are you okay with that?"

She was sort of surprised he was asking. "If you trust them, then I do too, Sir."

"With my life," he responded softly. The five then apparated to the gates of Malfoy Manor.

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Albus Dumbledore was thinking. He really hadn't felt this much glee in a long time. Everything was falling into place. He had Harry Potter exactly where he wanted him, he had loyal followers, and the prophesied child had even fallen into his lap. Albus couldn't help but chuckle. That small gift had come just in time. The added fact that the Granger girl's parents had just thrown her away. Well, it made it all the better. He would be able to gain the girl's full trust now.

It had been brilliant to have Severus take over the mentoring of the girl. The Potion's Master would learn to care for the girl, and then that would tether him even more fully into The Order. Oh, Albus would admit he was slightly concerned about Severus taking the girl near the Malfoys, after all, they had been friends from the time they were housemates at Hogwarts. But even that would work. It would give Hermione Granger her first look at a group of Purebloods; a family extremely prejudiced against Muggle-Borns. Which actually reminded him. He needed to have a word with the Sorting Hat.

Albus took the hat off the shelf behind his desk, and set it on the desk in front of himself. "My dear old friend," he began, and the Hat opened its folds.

The Hat gave a small cough, "Has a new year began, a new song to tell? Where are the students, I'll know them so well!"

Albus sighed. "There are no students yet. We still have a few more weeks until the beginning of the term. Now, I need to speak with you, and for now, you can hold off on the rhyming."

The Hat seemed to shrug a little. "All right. What do you need, Headmaster?"

"As you well know, this is the year Harry Potter will begin attending Hogwarts. We have also found the girl of prophecy." Albus found that he was a little disappointed in the lack of excitement shown by the Sorting Hat. "Her name is Hermione Granger." Again nothing. This was really quite disconcerting.

"What is it you're wanting from me, Headmaster? What can an old hat do for you?"

Albus chuckled. "You can put Miss Granger into Gryffindor. Along with Harry Potter. I'd like to keep them with Ronald Weasley. I think they'll make fabulous friends."

One fold on the old tattered hat arched up, as if raising one eyebrow at the Headmaster.

"Is there a problem with that request, Old Friend," Now Albus frowned. "The girl is a Muggle-Born. Surely we want to keep her in a safe place?"

"Never have I declared a child to a House they don't belong in," Hat said with quite a bit of attitude. "And best you remember that, Albus Dumbledore. Godric Gryffindor did not imbue me with the abilities I hold, so that I would fall sway to anyone's desires, both dark and light included."

Albus sighed in frustration. He should have known the thing would be difficult. Not that he would mention this to Severus Snape. The man had wondered if the hat would listen to Dumbledore. Well, he would just have to continue on his mission to educate Miss Granger, and have faith that the Hat would sort her into Gryffindor. Really, as long as it wasn't Slytherin it would be fine, and when was the last time a Muggle-Born had been sorted into the House of Snakes? Really, what did he have to worry about?

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Severus watched as Draco and Hermione walked ahead, in front of the adults. Hermione was patiently listening as Draco spoke to her animatedly. He wondered what she was thinking? He knew his godson could be quite the brat, and he had worried that Draco would look down upon the girl due to her blood status. But if he did, it did not show.

They reached the front doors of the Manor, and the door opened to show a house elf. The little elf trembled with excitement. "Mistress, Masters," it squeaked happily.

"Hullo, Bluebell," Draco grinned at the small creature. "I got my wand today. This is Hermione Granger, she's Uncle's Ward."

"Welcomes Miss Hermiones Grangers," the little elf's ears flapped.

"Hullo," Hermione greeted Bluebell.

"Why don't we adjourn to the front parlor for some tea and biscuits?" Narcissa suggested.

Hermione looked back and met Snape's eyes. Suddenly her throat was dry and it was hard to swallow. She did trust Professor Snape, but the thought of speaking to these people of her fears was daunting. Hermione knew, deep down, that everything Headmaster had been telling her was skewed, but there was still that little seed of doubt. She took a deep breath and waited.

Draco knew instantly when Hermione became nervous. He just didn't understand why. What he wanted to do was show her his home; the Manor, gardens and stables. Instead, it seemed that they were all going to sit and have tea. He took a moment to realize that this was good. This gave his parents a chance to see how interesting Hermione was. If they saw, then they wouldn't just be acting like they liked her, they would begin to like her. Draco wasn't a stupid boy. He just needed to figure out how to work this.

Severus approached Hermione, put a hand on her shoulder, and spoke softly. "I trust these people implicitly. However, if you have changed your mind about sharing with them, we can leave now."

She looked slightly past him, to see the three Malfoys. They had been nothing but kind to her since she had met them earlier that afternoon. True, it could be all an act, but she didn't truly believe Professor Snape would set her up like that.

Hermione just nodded at him, and then moved to sit on one of the small, elegant loveseats.

Severus walked over and stood behind the loveseat, one hand on her shoulder. "Hermione informed me today that she hadâ€¦ doubts about the Headmaster."

Everyone was sitting down now, Draco looking to his parents to make sure it was all right for him to stay. Lucius nodded, while Narcissa addressed Hermione, "Would you mind telling us why, Miss Granger."

Hermione blinked, coming out of her thoughts. "Oh, please, Mrs. Malfoy, call me Hermione."

Narcissa smiled at the girl. "Thank you for that, dear."

Draco sat, keeping silent. He was surprised. Almost anyone new coming into their world, mostly Muggle-Borns, believed in and trusted Albus Dumbledore. He had been raised differently, of course. His father had always told him to never underestimate the old man, never except sweets from him, always maintain a polite demeanor, and always focus on something of non-significance so the man couldn't read his mind. So, while he knew not to trust the Headmaster, he was surprised that Hermione didn't trust him.

"There wasâ€¦ a man I knew, someone from before. Headmaster has a lot of the same qualities. He smiles, acts friendly, says all the right words and all the right motions, butâ€¦ most of it seems like half-truths, or flat out lies. There is something about me that he is trying to, oh, I don't know the word. I don't want to say claim, but it seems that he is trying to steer me down a set path, but he won't come out and tell me anything that would specifically concern me." Her eyes flickered to look at Narcissa, and then Lucius, steering completely clear of looking to where Draco was sitting. "For the last two months, all I've heard is how much Purebloods despise Muggle-Borns. How they call them Mudbloods. That we're considered filthy, and less than scum. He's told me of the different houses of the school, and how the house of the brave, Gryffindor, is hated and reviled by the house of the cunning and deceitful, Slytherin. Headmaster told me I wouldn't ever want to be put into Slytherin. Said he worried for my safety, because they're all Purebloods. But I read Hogwarts; A History, and nothing in that book says that Slytherins are deceitful. I'm sure some could. But I think that would go for all of the houses. It can be human nature after all."

Narcissa watched as a fine tremble ran along Hermione's shoulders, but the girl didn't stop speaking.

"Headmaster said how he was hoping I was put into Gryffindor. Then, four days ago, I came to my table in the library and there was a small book left there. It was about the war you went through ten years ago." Now Hermione looked at Lucius. "Talked of a Dark Lord, and his followers, the Death Eaters. Talked of how the Death Eaters had Dark Revels, and killed Muggles and Mudbloods without remorse. Headmaster told me that the Malfoys were the most loyal of the man's followers; willing to do whatever it takes to make sure their Master succeeds in his 'evil' plans."

She cleared her throat. "Then of course I was told the story of Harry Potter and his supposed great act of bravery to save the world." Hermione rolled her eyes.

Severus smirked a little, "And you don't believe in Harry Potter, the 'Saviour of the Wizarding World'?"

"He's a child. And he was a baby at the time," she scoffed. "He wasn't the hero. If this happened, then the hero was his mother. She's the one who sacrificed herself for her child. It was her love that caused the death curse to rebound onto the supposed 'Dark Lord'. And really, the boy is coming into school, not knowing anything about magic, and is eleven. He'll either love every minute of it, or hate it. But no, I think his mum was the hero."

Severus wasn't sure he could quite catch his breath. She thought Lily was the hero.

"I don't trust him. I don't know who to trust. No one else at the school has mentioned any of this." Hermione looked up and over at Severus Snape. "I do trust Professor Snape. He is one of the most honest people I've met."

"I'm a double agent, dear girl," he told her softly. She cocked her head in confusion. "I'm a Death Eater. Dumbledore thinks I'm spying for him, but in actuality I spy for the Dark Lord."

She let out a deep breath. "Does that mean you hate me as well?" her voice was small. Strangely enough, it didn't lessen her confidence in the man. He had to have reasons for why he did the things he did.

Narcissa moved over to sit next to her on the loveseat and wrapped an arm around Hermione's shoulders. "Oh, sweetheart, none of us hates you. Even Tom wouldn't hate you. That foolish old man has been filling your head with lies. He's been filling everyone's heads with lies, for a very long time now."

Hermione basked in the hold Narcissa had on her. It had been so long since she'd experienced a mother's love. Of course, Narcissa wasn't her mother, but none the less, it felt so good to be held. "I don't understand."

"Then perhaps we should tell you the story of a dark wizard by the name of Grindelwald," Lucius offered after sharing a look with Severus.

4. Chapter 4

****Same Disclaimer: I own nothing, and get no money for it. Just the happiness of someone reading my fiction of fiction. thank you.****

The room was quiet for a few moments before Lucius spoke. "Have you learned anything about Grindelwald?"

Hermione's head cocked to the side slightly as she thought. "Yes." she said finally. "Headmaster Dumbledore defeated Gellert Grindelwald in a duel in 1945 I think. Grindelwald was a Dark Wizard who killed a young girl Ariana Dumbledore."

"Not exactly. True, Dumbledore did defeat Gellert in 1945," Lucius allowed. "And true, people considered him a Dark Wizard, only second to Lord Voldemort. But he did not kill that poor girl."

"I don't exactly understand what Dark Magic is," Hermione said softly. "I mean, learning the few spells that I've learned Headmaster said that Dark Magic deals in death and curses and blood magic. But don't some healing potions require a drop of blood? And couldn't any spell cast hurt someone? And, though I haven't seen very much in the way of Dark spells, couldn't they be used for good purposes?"

Narcissa smiled, "You're exactly right. Magic, Dark or Light, is all based on the intent behind the casting. Of course there are some spells that should never be used. But most Wizards and Witches are intelligent enough not to use them."

Hermione nodded. "So, this Gellert Grindelwald did not kill Ariana. What happened then?"

"Gellert and Albus were great friends. They devised a plan to revolutionize the Wizarding World. They were to find three items; the three Deathly Hallows, and would then become the Masters of Death. They wished to end the Statute of Secrecy, and they wanted to take over the globe. Put certain Wizards and Witches into positions of

power, and rule over the Muggles," Lucius explained.

Hermione's eyes went so wide Snape was certain she was going to hurt herself. "But there's a good reason for the Statute of Secrecy. If Muggles were to find out about us, it would be the Salem Witch Trials all over again. But this time instead of innocents who were not witches being 'tested' and killed, they would get us. We would fight back, and it would be war. Muggles have horrible weapons of war. Bombs that would decimate everything. Where nothing would be fit to live in that area for hundreds of years."

Lucius nodded. "We'll talk about that later. Ariana was mentally unbalanced, but getting better. She'd been attacked by a group of Muggle boys when she was very young. Albus's brother, Aberforth, realized what Albus and Gellert were doing. The three began to duel in Dumbledore Manor, Ariana, still such a young girl, fourteen I think?" Narcissa nodded so he knew he was right. "She adored Aberforth, and didn't understand why her eldest brother was attacking Aberforth. She fought next to her favored brother, and she fought hard with. A killing curse was thrown, hitting Ariana in the chest." He stopped talking and cleared his throat.

"Albus said it was Gellert who'd thrown the curse. Said that it was meant for Aberforth. Gellert strongly denied this. He left Britain with no charges against him. He had no love for Albus after that day. He went to achieve their plan on his own." Narcissa took up the story. "Dumbledore went and became the Transfiguration professor at Hogwarts. That's when he met our Dark Lord."

Snape snorted.

Narcissa smiled. "Tom Riddle was a brilliant student. A Prodigy. His story is quite complicated I'm afraid. Dumbledore, whether he was still plotting his revolution or not, liked power. He's already spread his tale of Gellert killing Ariana, and of course people believed the wonderful, do no wrong, Albus Dumbledore. When Tom just kept getting more powerful, Dumbledore was not pleased. That's when the insidious, vicious rumors started that Tom was only powerful due to Dark Magic. His House stood with him; Slytherins NEVER turn on their own. But the other Houses, especially Dumbledore's pets, the Gryffindors, turned on him. Even as Head Boy the others treated him like nothing. Just like that orphan boy who had nothing. But Tom was amazing," All three adults smiled in delight. "That boy taught himself wandless, voiceless magic in that hovel he was housed in for so long."

"Wait, what happened to Grindelwald?" Hermione asked with a frown. She definitely wanted to hear and learn about Tom Riddle, but first

"He began to work on his revolution in Europe, and built a fortress, Nuremburg. As time went on, he grew more secluded, even though he had followers. When Muggles began dying, Albus announced that it was Grindelwald, and that he'd begun a genocide of Muggles, and Muggleborns. That's when they duelled in 1945. That's when Dumbledore imprisoned Gellert in that fortress of his."

Severus began speaking, and he had Hermione's full attention. "Through our spy network, we learned that it wasn't Grindelwald who shot the curse that killed Ariana Dumbledore; it was Albus. We've

learned that he only dueled the man to get his wandâ€¦ one of the Deathly Hallows." Snape knelt down so Hermione was right in front of him. "The Headmaster is a dangerous man Hermione. He is willing to use children to wage a war. And when those he wants dead, are dead, he will make sure the children are as well. He doesn't share power. There are things you need to look out for when dealing with him at any time."

Hermione trembled a little, and Draco couldn't help himself. He moved over to sit next to her on the loveseat, and took her hand into his. He glanced to his parents, hoping not to see any rage, and was surprised to seeâ€¦. Approval. Weird.

"What do I need to do?" she whispered.

"There are rules my Father has always told me to follow," Draco started speaking without even thinking about the adults. Hermione turned to look the blonde boy in the eyes. He held her gaze. "Never look him in the eye. If for any reason you have to, then make sure to focus on something unimportant, like lip gloss, or shampoo, or even that test you're studying for. Also, never accept candy from him. There are potions he mixes them with that have different affects. Always be courteous, and friendly to the man. If possible. And never underestimate him just because he's elderly and has those twinkling eyes." Draco finished with a nod of his head.

Lucius didn't even try to hide his smile. The boy had almost told the rules of dealing with Dumbledore verbatim.

"No one listened to this Grindelwald?" she asked with a frown.

"It was just too easy to believe Albus." Snape said sadly. "After all, Grindelwald was a revolutionary. There were those that did believe him. Abraxas Malfoy, Thoros Knott, Indio and Marchesa Zabini, and a few others, but the rest were too enraptured of Dumbledore; Leader of the Light."

Hermione was so grateful to have Draco's hand in hers. She felt so cold. "Alright. Now tell me about Tom Riddle, please."

"Albus slowly started spreading rumors. And he had his loyal followers help him. They said Tom was trying to kill Muggle-Born children at school. That he was a Dark Wizard bent on ruling our world, and destroying the Muggle world. Then the old man started talking about a prophecy." Narcissa took a deep breath. "We don't know the entire prophecy, but we do know that it surrounds the Potter boy. One night, the Potters were murdered, the baby scarred. And Albus laid it all at the feet of Tom."

Hermione's eyebrows scrunched up. "Wait a minute, are you saying that Lord Voldemort did not kill the Potters?"

"That's exactly what we're saying," Snape told her. He sneered, "Probably had one of his lackeys do it so his wand was clean of death. Perhaps Moody, or Shackbolt."

"Perhaps even Weasley," Lucius offered from where he sat.

"Which one, Arthur or Molly?" Snape's voice dripped with disgust.

"The Weasley'sâ€¦" Narcissa thought about her words. "Aren't quite what they seem on the outside. To most they appear as a poor Pureblood family, barely making ends meet with their odd house and their seven children. Good hearts all."

"Headmaster, he mentioned that there would be a Weasley boy coming to Hogwarts this year."

"Oh yes, second to last child; last boy. There are three other Weasley's there currently. I do not know much of Percy Weasley, but the twins, Fred and George, are actually a delight." Narcissa smiled slightly. "As are Charlie and William. But Molly and Arthurâ€¦ they will smile in your face, then shove a dagger between your ribs. I could believe it would be Molly to kill the Potters. She always felt quite jealous of the younger, lovelier redhead, Lily Evans, one-day Potter."

Lucius looked at Hermione carefully. He knew they were inundating her with information. "Miss Granger," he began but was cut off.

"Oh Sir, please! I apologize for interrupting, but please call me Hermione." The girl almost begged.

"Hermione," he said giving the child a gentle smile. "I truly hope you believe us when we are telling you this. Once school begins, you'll be sorted into a house. Gryffindor if Dumbledore has anything to say about it. We want you to be safe. We're very glad that Severus is going to be your Guardian." Lucius sat down in the chair across from Hermione and Draco, Snape still standing behind the loveseat. "When Harry Potter was born, Dumbledore announced to quite a few individuals that there was a prophecy concerning the child and Tom Riddle. It spoke of how one can't live if the other does. Albus Dumbledore plans on honing Harry into a weapon to use against Tom."

"That's horrible!" she exclaimed. "He's just a boy!" Draco stroked her hand with his thumb, and she seemed to calm somewhat. "I know what you're trying to tell me, Mr. Malfoy. When I get to school I will end up hearing a completely story as to the one I just heard. Perhaps more than one. Though I doubt I will hear anything of the friendship between Headmaster and Gellert Grindelwald." She looked down at the skirt of her yellow sundress. Then at Draco's hand still soothing hers. She had to be careful there. Her crush could get out of control, and he'd already said he'd have an arranged marriage. She would never fit into his world. Besides, they were both still children. So, why did the thought of him with another girl, in the future, sting so badly? "What else am I not being told?"

"First, we need you to know that one of the reasons we brought you here was to give you this information," Severus told his ward.

She nodded.

"I didn't learn of this until the night we came and got you," Severus began. "Normally, it's Minerva who goes and educates the Muggle-Borns and their families about their gifts, and the school. But for some reason, Albus was determined that we would do this." He cleared his throat, and moved in front of the loveseat the girl and his Godson sat on. "He started talking about this Muggle-Born being special. And

we had to take care of her." Severus stopped. How should he tell her?

"Oh my," she whispered. Her mind had been working as soon as he started talking about coming to get her. "There's another prophecy, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"About me, or at least he thinks it's about me?" her voice had gone toneless. "Do you know what this prophecy states?"

The men were silent. her eyes had lost their sparkle they'd gained upon getting her wand.

Narcissa was the one to speak. "Strong; her heart and soul, as pure as any Pureblood born. Her blood will bring her pain.

To our own society, a shining beacon of hope and brilliance. Though, for now she is still a fragile flame.

The girl, powerful, in mind, body and abilities. All whether she stands with the bird born of fire, or he who shall not be named."

Hermione's mind was racing. She thought she understood some of it. The last part, that basically said whomever this prophecy was about, whomever this girl stands with at the end, she would in essence be the deciding factor in which way the world swung. That meant that Dumbledore was going to use her, just as he was going to use the Potter boy. And he had his little Weasley spy all ready to begin the brainwashing. But, what did this mean for her? Dumbledore would TRY to use her, but now she was warned.

And what about Professor Snape, and the Malfoy family. They were Dumbledore's opposition. Certainly, they had given her valuable information, and certainly they'd told her of this prophecy, butâ€¦ if Dumbledore wanted to use her to meet his ends, well what in the world would make her think that they weren't doing the same? It would be almost like a tug of war, she thought faintly.

It really made sense now. How nice the Pureblood family was being. How charming the young Malfoy was. She should have known really. They couldn't really like her. All she did was cause problems. All she did was torment her family until they couldn't stand the pain; or the sight of her. Hermione slowly pulled her hand away from Draco, and in her peripheral vision she saw a slight frown mar his handsome face.

Hermione started breathing heavily. Both sides. Both sides could go after her. Perhaps they'd hurt her. She'd endured pain before, but had thought this new world would be a safe haven. She didn't even realize tears had started rolling down her face as her breath came in slow pants. It was going to be like Reverend Anthony all over again. What would they do to her to make her join them?

She didn't feel the people trying to help her, and didn't hear their worry. Hermione was trapped in her mind. The last time Reverend Anthony had tried to 'save' her. It had been the rebirthing. They'd held the blankets so tight. She was having trouble fighting her way

through. He had said it had to be that way. He'd said it's just like being born again. He was wrong.

When she'd been born, not that she really remembered, but when she'd been born, she'd been breathing; and loved. With the rebirthing, she'd stopped breathing. Obviously someone had done CPR, but when she began breathing again, all she saw was unhappiness. Her mother hadn't wanted her to come back. No breath, no love.

5. Chapter 5

****author's note:** This fiction is AU. It is a bit Dark, but not always. When I say Dark, I simply mean that some bad things happen. But it will be sweet as well. This is a love story after all. My characters are probably OOC as well, and for that I apologize to those of you that detest that. Still, I hope whomever does read this, will enjoy it.**

****lots of weird, different stuff coming up. hope i don't lose readers.****

****Disclaimer:** I do not in any way own part of the Harry Potter franchise, nor did I create any of these fantastic characters; Ms. JK Rowling did. There might be a few OC's, but hopefully they will only add to my storyline.**

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"Mum, what's wrong with her?" Draco's voice was filled with fear and concern.

Narcissa moved forward and quickly hugged Draco. "You must remember, Draco, that Hermione had a life none would envy before she came to us." She let him go and moved towards the girl. Severus was already grasping the girl by the shoulders.

Hermione's eyes were wide with terror. Tears still streamed, and her body was stiff. All that kept going through her mind were the different ways her parents had tried to exorcise the 'demons' out of her; Reverend Anthony present at all events. Her stiff body crumpled, surprising Severus, who had to lower her gently to the floor.

"I don't like the speed of her pulse, or the shallow breathing," he muttered.

"Let me hold her for a moment, Severus," Narcissa ordered quietly. She had to move around Draco, who would NOT leave the girl's side. Narcissa called for an elf to bring her a cool rag. Once she had it she began running it soothingly over Hermione's face, all the while holding the girl to her.

Hermione's eyes fluttered. "Please, no more. I can't breathe, Mum. Please let me out." She was murmuring and her head shook back and forth, her body trembling.

"Shhh, shhh, it's alright, sweetheart. No one will hurt you here. We won't hurt you. You're safe, and always will be with us," Narcissa crooned.

"Hermione," Draco whispered. "Please don't be scared of me.

Her eyes opened and looked first at him, and then at the beautiful blonde woman holding her. "I can't help it, I'm so scared. And I hate it. I don't know who to trust. I want to trust Professor Snape, and your family. I do. But all I can see is that both Headmaster and now, your side wants my favor. I will be torn apart no matter what direction I go in."

"Oh, Darling, no," Narcissa assured her. "We are trying to protect you. I know that might be hard to believe knowing everything you know now. Especially because of your life in the Muggle World," Narcissa hugged Hermione tightly. "If you choose to fight with Dumbledore, when the time comes, we will hate it, but only because we would worry for you. We've only known you a day, and yet you've already impacted our lives."

Hermione couldn't help but to sniffle, and without realizing it, she'd taken Draco's hand again, and snuggled into Narcissa's hold. "I don't know when I became so weak."

"Darling, you're eleven years old. You're brilliant, from what Severus says, and you survived horrors that I can't imagine. You are not weak just because you want, or need, comfort. You are not weak for understanding the risks you take. With what Albus has told you, of course you'd be concerned we would be waiting to either hurt you, or trick you."

Lucius knelt in front of the two women. Draco couldn't believe it. His father was kneeling on the ground. "Hermione," Lucius began. "Today, when I knew I would be meeting Severus's Muggle-Born ward, it's true. I planned on suffering through the day, and I planned to be polite and smile, and do everything that is socially acceptable. But then we met you." He smiled and reached out a hand to stroke her cheek. "I didn't suffer at all today. You are a wonderful child. One that I think will be in our lives for a very long time. And I find I am pleased at that idea. Please give us a chance."

Hermione looked up at Severus, and the small twitch of his lips, almost a smile she thought, told her that she need not fear him. Then she looked at Draco. She felt horrible guilt. Just looking into her new friend's eyes told her she had nothing to fear from him. "I'm sorry," she told him in a quiet voice.

Draco squeezed her hand slightly. "You don't have to be sorry. Just know that I'm your friend, and I'm going to make sure you have a lot of friends before we go to school."

Hermione closed her eyes. With those few words from each of them that was all it took. How could she not align herself with this family? Perhaps, once she met this Dark Lord she would change her mind. But for now she knew her choice.

Narcissa was still holding the girl, and rubbing her arm softly. "I have a fantastic idea."

"What is that, my love?" Lucius asked.

"I think that Severus and Hermione should stay with us for the rest of the summer. If Severus has any work to finish, he can certainly

floo back and forth, since our floos are connected to his private quarters. Hermione won't be alone during the day," Narcissa saw the girl about to protest. "Not that the house elf isn't perfectly lovely, but meeting other children your age is more important."

"But, I was reading a lot of books on different magic and spells and history," the bookworm inside the girl started showing.

"Then you'll love our library, Hermione!" Draco said enthusiastically. "It's bigger than Hogwarts."

Hermione had to admit she was tempted. She looked over at her Guardian. "What do you want to do, Professor?"

"I think the idea has merit, however I believe we should tell Albus that I'm taking you to my home at Spinner's End." Snape agreed. "I don't want him to think you're slipping away from him, and start adding pressure to turn you to his side."

With Narcissa and Draco's help Hermione stood, and nodded at Snape. "I don't want to see, or spend any time with the Headmaster any more than necessary." She swallowed, her belly clenching. "He worries me. And, I don't want to know this Ronald Weasley, but, I do want to meet Harry Potter, and see what he is made of. If Dumbledore means to use us both as tools in his little machinations well, it seems I'm leaning towards this side, and perhaps this Harry can be persuaded as well."

Draco frowned. "You want to meet Potter?" He didn't understand the hot twisting feeling in his stomach at the thought of her befriending Potter.

"No," she told him and moved closer, holding his hand a little tighter. Hermione felt his anxiety. Not understanding it, but wanting to sooth him anyway. "We need to meet Potter." She told him frankly. "You, me, your friends. If we get to him before Weasley does"

All three adults looked at the girl in admiration. "You would make a fantastic Slytherin," Lucius told her.

Snape had that little smirk on his face. He wondered how he'd feel, seeing the son of the man he hated befriending his ward. Still, it was quite a brilliant idea. If they could move Potter to their side. Well, Dumbledore would be furious, but it would be worth it. If they could make that happen he wouldn't have to play this damned part any longer; and he was so tired of playing this part of undying loyalty to the treacherous old man.

"Well then, if it's alright with Professor Snape, then I would love to take you up on your offer to stay in your home," she said shyly.

"Wonderful," Narcissa smiled and helped Hermione to her feet. "I will arrange with the house elves to work with Shinny to get your belongings moved over to your room you'll be staying in."

"There really isn't very much," Hermione said, embarrassment coloring her voice.

"Well, what there is will be put into your room. And perhaps you and I will go shopping one afternoon." Narcissa smiled. "I have to tell you, I'm very excited about this. As much as I love my Draco, I did always want a little girl."

"I would like that. It's been a long time since I've been shopping anywhere but the flea markets."

"What are flea markets?" Draco asked.

"It's where one would purchase clothing that has been previously used at a less expensive rate," Snape said dryly. "Hermione, why didn't you use some of your inheritance to purchase clothing?"

She looked at him. He didn't realize, did he? Was the Wizarding World so very different? Obviously. "I would have needed an adult to take me into the store, to get me there with safe transportation, and it isn't often that they paid that much attention to me, or what I was wearing. There aren't that many stores that will sell to children my age if I was by myself. Shipper's Flea Market is two buildings away from the shelter. It was easy for me to go in and out, and the wife of the man who owned the flea market, was the lady who did night registration at the shelter." Hermione shrugged. "They didn't question me. Actually, they looked out for me when they could."

"As kind as that couple was," Narcissa spoke again, "we are going to take you to proper stores to get you outfitted. Now come, we will get you settled into a guest room. And once you're in there, it will no longer be a guest room. It will be yours." She waited while Hermione said good night to the men, and then Narcissa, Draco, and Hermione headed up the grand staircase in the foyer.

Draco let her go with a light kiss to the tips of her fingers, and both children blushed. "Goodnight, Hermione. Please sleep well, and we'll find something fun to do tomorrow!"

She nodded and followed Narcissa Malfoy into the bedroom. It was beautiful. There was so much space, and besides the entry, there were two more doors. All of the framing and wainscoting was done in gold leaf, and the rest was decorated in shades of a deep, royal purple. Hermione walked around, stunned. She ran a hand over the dresser. "Are these antiques?"

"Yes, most of the furniture in the Manor is antique. If for any reason you don't care for the color scheme, we can get you together with Mitzy, she's our elf that does most of the decorating. She has an eye for beauty."

"No, no, this is. This is beyond anything I would have expected."

Narcissa's smile was a little smug. "The door to your right is your wardrobe, and to the left is your bath."

The room was quiet as Hermione looked around, and Narcissa watched Hermione. Finally, Hermione spoke, "Mrs. Malfoy, might I ask you a few questions?"

Narcissa walked to the bed and sat on the edge, "Of course you can." Then she patted the spot next to her and Hermione also took a

seat.

"Everyone refers to Tom Riddle, or Lord Voldemort, or the Dark Lord. I understand Tom is his birth name, and I even understand the anagram of his name and Lord Voldemort, but I don't understand why everyone refers to him as the Dark Lord if he isn't.

Narcissa had not expected that question. "Well, first you must understand, there really isn't light or dark. True, some wizards use their spells and magic to hurt or destroy, but in the end it really rests on what the individual is doing. For example, do you know what the levitate spell is?"

Hermione was nodding enthusiastically, "Oh yes ma'am. It's really the first spell I read about."

"Good. So, say you used that spell on me. Would it be light, neutral or dark?"

The eleven-year-old had to think for a moment. "The book says that it's a spell that would have no adverse reactions."

"Let's not consider the book currently. Let's look at each use. If you were going to use the spell for light, you would use it to push me away from an oncoming attack. Neutral would be pushing me into a room and locking it. There's protection certainly, but it's also taking my decisions away. And Dark magic?"

The girl thought for a moment. Then her eyes lit up, "If I was going to use it as Dark magic, I would use it to injure you. Like, levitate you off a cliff, or over something horrible."

"Exactly," Narcissa was pleased Hermione's mind worked so quickly and followed paths. "I'm not saying that Tom hasn't done some dark things. He has, we probably all have, but we call him the dark lord, not really as a title, but as a mockery of Dumbledore and his side. Shining with pure white light, those Phoenixes are."

"Oh! Phoenixes?"

"Yes, Albus has banded a little group together that fight the, I believe, Death Eaters is what they finally decided to call us."

Hermione took the other woman's hand. She knew that this was upsetting the other woman.

The older woman patted her hand. "Yes, we saw the comparison to the prophecy as well. We aren't stupid, Hermione. We know we will have to prove ourselves to you. And we will. All we ask is that you give us that opportunity. I will not lie to you, Hermione. There is still blood prejudice in our world. And once it was very strong in the Malfoy family, but I think I've managed to wear that down in Lucius." Narcissa stood and moved to the door. "Lucius and I really do like you quite a lot you know." Then she quietly closed Hermione's door behind her.

Hermione took one more look around the room before moving to the bathroom. This room was large also. And it was decorated in silver and teal. There was a vanity with two inset sinks, a pantry, a large,

glass-enclosed shower and a bathing tub that looked bigger than a hot tub. The only reason she knew about hot tubs was because Reverend Anthony had one. She hadn't been in one; and was especially glad she hadn't been in his.

Her pajamas were already sitting on the counter next to the sink, along with two fluffy looking teal towels. Hermione decided she would take the time to enjoy a bath, and spent probably half an hour getting clean and washing her hair. She'd been having trouble with her hair until one of the Malfoy house elves had popped in and helped her. The elf's name was Jaye. She liked Jaye.

So far she liked all of the house elves she'd met. They were all so friendly, and more than willing to take the time to help her, or even just stay with her if she was lonely, or upset. Hermione was delighted by it. She grinned as she slipped into the old blue nightgown. It was quite large on her, the arms coming past her fingers, and the skirt falling to the ground. Originally it had belonged to one of the children of the parishioners at the Church her parents belonged to.

Hermione slipped under the covers of the beautiful bed, and laid her head on the soft pillow. She thought she might have trouble sleeping, but obviously the emotional day had taken its toll, as she drifted into a deep sleep.

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Narcissa strode into Hermione's room at eight am the next morning without even knocking first. She moved to the bed and looked down to the small girl that a random prophecy had stated would change their lives; one way or another. It looked like the young girl had slept restlessly, as the blankets were down near her feet. The clothing Hermione wore was at least twenty years old, made of polyester, and though cared for, was still ripped and torn. She had the idea that it was Hermione herself that took care of her clothing.

All of it, all of the neglect and abuse that this poor girl had been through infuriated Narcissa. She didn't care if the girl was Muggle-Born, Half-Blood, Pureblood or part Griffin by Merlin, all she knew now was that this child had come into her life. This child would be as Severus's own child once the Guardianship went through, and, it seemed, that this child had some type of role in her darling son's life.

Narcissa once again sat on the edge of the bed and decided to wake Hermione up as gently as possible. "Hermione," she spoke in a soft voice. "Wake up, Darling, it's time for breakfast."

Warm amber eyes fluttered open slowly, until they focused in on Narcissa Malfoy. Then her shyness returned. "Good morning, Mrs. Malfoy."

"Good morning. I thought we would have a bit of breakfast, and then we could go shopping for some new clothing for you. I need to pick up a few things for Draco as well. We can ask him if he'd like to come with us, or he can stay at home while we go. I already know his measurements, and I can always alter magically, so it isn't as if he has to go with us. We can have a bit to eat while we're out, and come home to rest before dinner. Then, perhaps, we can invite a few of

Draco's friends over for the weekend."

"Oh," Hermione murmured, and looked down at her hands that were clasping and unclasping in her lap.

Narcissa moved one curl behind Hermione's ear. "Hermione, I know you're worried, but if you could, just trust me a small bit. If even one of those children hurts your feelings, or makes you feel uncomfortable, we will make them leave."

Hermione nodded her head slowly, it wasn't as if she was going to tell them if one of the other children was mean to her. She wasn't a snitch after all. Narcissa left, and Hermione took a few moments to get ready for the day before heading downstairs for breakfast.

End
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